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12 Cultural Relevance in Tribal Libraries

Native American/Alaska Native libraries need to be established by local people taking into account the traditional worldview and integrating the traditional language as much as possible. Native American/Alaska Native people face social and personal challenges at a far greater rate than the general population of America. It is believed that these social ills are rooted in the historic separation of native people from their traditional cultures, loss of land, language, and sovereignty. This separation of people and culture and the resultant social ills are identified as a form of post-traumatic stress disorder called historical trauma. Psychiatric professionals have demonstrated success treating historical trauma by re-engaging people with their traditional values and culture.

Tribal libraries, serving as living cultural centers, can play a role in Native communities' struggle to address historical trauma. However, in order to genuinely reflect local native culture, these tribal libraries must be initiated by the local community government, built and maintained by local people, and must reflect local values and information needs. Furthermore, they must be organized in a way that is sensible to the local population who are using the materials in the tribal library. Without this grassroots, intimate level of community support and participation, these tribal libraries may ultimately fail to address the needs of their communities. Without this community creation and support, tribal libraries risk becoming simply one more irrelevant artifact of the Western world inserted into the lives of native people and may, in fact, play into the continued march of assimilation that is at the root of historical trauma.

Introduction

Common responsibilities of many libraries include the collection of material and a responsibility to make that material available to library users. A fault in either responsibility is a failure of the library. It is important to look at our libraries and ask if they are fulfilling these responsibilities.

In the model of the industrial revolution, Western library practice has been systematized across the United States. We see this in the two prominent classification systems, Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress. We see this with MARC records resulting in pre-determined metadata fields and widespread copy cataloguing. We see it in the almost exclusive use of English in our library catalogues and our collections.

The strengths of these systematic cataloguing standards are obvious. If all libraries are the same throughout the nation, anyone familiar with the system can walk into any library in the country and use the catalogue to quickly find what they want. It makes cataloguing much simpler and faster, saving time and money.

However, for Native American/Alaska Native people, there are concerns related to assimilation and colonization that must be considered. Colonization has resulted in rapid and traumatic cultural change – the loss of language, lands, governance, children, and legitimacy of thought – leading to widespread social challenges.

All cultures need to store and retrieve information. For cultures with a history of abuse by Western people, a Western-style library may function as one more emblem of assimilation. Libraries in these communities must overcome a variety of hurdles to collect material relevant to the community and to provide the best access they can to that material. Like any library, they must consider their patron base and adjust library practice to meet the needs of those patrons. This reaction to patron need may result in a departure from standardized library practice.

This chapter will discuss the challenges native communities may encounter with the traditional Western library, the basis for those challenges, and highlight some ways tribal libraries may address those challenges. This begins with a brief background description of Native American/Alaska Native cultural losses and the effect of those losses.

Background: Loss of Culture and Language

Unfortunately for most American Indian children, their Indian identity was often viewed by the American government as an obstacle to be overcome if they were to succeed in the modern world. The history of federal Indian policy has been to separate Indian children from their culture (Harvey 1996, 170).

With colonial westward expansion, native nations and the United States found themselves in a conflict that resulted in the near genocide of native people and the destruction of native cultural traditions. In 1819, the Civilization Fund Act was passed and the United States government applied its assimilative policy using education as a means to further erode native culture (Alton 2005; Powers 2009; McCarty and Watahomigie 1998).

The United States federal government realized some success in their attempt to assimilate native people. Abuse was common in the boarding schools (Brave Heart et al. 2011), and many native children learned to distance themselves from their heritage culture and heritage language (McCarty, Romero and Zepeda

2006; Powers 2009), resulting in a decision that often lasted through their lives (McCarty, Romero and Zepeda 2006; Coyhis and Simonelli 2008; Morgan and Freeman 2009). Further, it is theorized that this trauma is passed down from generation to generation, which may contribute to the prevalence of continued mental health issues among native people (Brave Heart et al. 2011; Maxwell 2014).

Today, while direct assimilation is no longer stated as government policy, assimilation and destruction of native cultures continues through several channels. Among the primary forces leading to cultural degradation are nationalized education policies (Ball 2004). A national curriculum fails to take into account local knowledge or allow time for students to study cultural knowledge.

Another channel eroding native culture is mass media (McCarty, Romero and Zepeda 2006; Morris, Talbot and Lobo 2009). The use of media by the super-culture to inaccurately depict native cultures dates back to the early days of colonialism (Williams 2000). Today, much like nationalized education, this is probably not deliberate, but damage is still being done by the national media that undermine native self-image through inaccurate depictions of native culture (Kirmayer, Gone and Moses 2014).

Language, which is intimately related to worldview and culture, is also threatened by the almost exclusive use of the English language in media which is broadly consumed by native people (McCarty, Romero and Zepeda 2006).

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has also recognized problems related to cultural appropriation. WIPO describes the problem this way, stating that indigenous peoples want “... protection for traditional forms of creativity and innovation, which, under the conventional IP system, are generally regarded as being in the public domain, and thus free for anyone to use. Indigenous peoples, local communities and many countries reject a “public domain” status of TK [traditional knowledge] and TCEs [traditional cultural expressions] and argue that this opens them up to unwanted misappropriation and misuse” (WIPO 2015, 10).

Background: Historical Trauma

The military subjugation of native people throughout the Americas and corresponding relocation from traditional lands to reservations, and the cultural extermination that followed through US assimilation policy, did much to harm native people. Loss of culture, language, land, and full control over their lives has led to an inflated rate of social challenges such as substance abuse and physical and sexual violence. Some theorists believe these social challenges are an out-

growth of a form of post-traumatic stress disorder called historical trauma (Robin, Chester and Goldman 1996; Brave Heart 1998; Coyhis and Simonelli 2008; Morgan and Freeman 2009; Brave Heart et al. 2011).

A common theme has emerged as social workers, medical professionals, and psychiatrists have struggled to determine a way to manage these social problems. Embracing culture and introducing culturally appropriate responses to these challenges seems to be the most successful strategy for Native American/Alaska Native people to cope with historical trauma (Brave Heart 1998; Coyhis and Simonelli 2008; Morgan and Freeman 2009; Brave Heart et al. 2011; Gone 2013). In 2009, Morgan and Freeman wrote (2009, 90):

An increased respect is given to healing practices that have lived underground, safe from the destructive winds of change. People who have suffered through decades, and in some cases, centuries of cultural confusion, deprivation, frustration, discouragement, and defeat are finding themselves empowered and regenerated. They are taking the reins of their own healing. The erosion of Native mental health, tied to the loss of traditional culture and support systems, is being reversed by a surge of spiritually based energy. The outcomes are feelings of renewed hope and challenge.

The Role of the Library

While libraries cannot address all of these challenges, they can change their practices to better reflect the communities they serve and stop contributing to further cultural destruction.

As discussed in previous sections in this chapter, many Native Americans/Alaska Natives suffer from intergenerational grief brought on by racism, oppression, and genocide. Manifestations of this oppression are visible even today in books, academic papers, popular media, and educational policy.

Library practice also stems from an inherently Western perspective that often neglects the minority worldview (Berman 1972). This takes shape in the materials collected, metadata, subject classifications, and even the position of books on the shelf. Librarians have been discussing the problems for several years and continue to examine the problem though little has been done about it.

Alexander (2013) advocates for better academic library practices when handling American Indian/Alaska Native materials and suggests working closely with American Indian Studies programs on campus. Kam (2007) and Tomren (2003) examine the inherent cultural biases in Library of Congress Classification. Tomren makes the point succinctly: “These classification systems and subject headings reflect the Eurocentric, male, Christian orientations of their origina-

tors as well as the time period in which they were constructed” (Tomren 2003, 1). Lincoln describes the biases in the arrangement of Alaska Native languages used by the Library of Congress as “... misleading, out of date, and simply linguistically inappropriate. Inconsistencies, errors, and misrepresentations appeared throughout the categories, which did not consider geographical, ethnic, or linguistic accuracy” (Lincoln 2003, 275).

The problem of cultural bias isn’t restricted to libraries; others have noted the problem as well. The First Archivist Circle, “... a group of nineteen Native American and non-Native American archivists, librarians, museum curators, historians, and anthropologists gathered at Northern Arizona University ...” (First Archivist Circle 2006, ¶3) and drafted the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, in an attempt “... to identify best professional practices for culturally responsive care and use of American Indian archival material held by non-tribal organizations” (First Archivist Circle 2006, ¶3).

Developing better professional practices for libraries, archives and museums is a noble goal worthy of pursuit. However, continuing to rely on institutions from outside native cultures to accurately understand and organize those cultures in a library is a losing bet. No one is better equipped to know and represent the worldview of a native community than the members of that community. It is this cultural element that makes it so important for native communities to build their own libraries and to consider establishing their own best practices for their local material.

Ball discusses the need for indigenous peoples to feel confident in their worldview and to be able to pass that understanding on to their children (Ball 2004). Ball was discussing education and, since libraries play a role in education, Ball’s argument can be extended to them. Ball insists that the community be at the heart of locally driven education policy and so the community must be at the heart of the library and its operation.

Libraries should be built to serve the needs of their local communities. If a library is in a largely Spanish-speaking neighbourhood, they naturally will acquire Spanish language materials. A culturally responsible library has an obligation to house materials for their local community in which both the materials collected and the catalogue used to find those materials are in that community’s traditional language. The collection should represent that community’s worldview. The library should collect media that has significance for that community that is often identified in the collection development policy. Tribal libraries can, and should, go a step further by building a cataloguing system, collecting the associated metadata, describing the materials in cultural terms that represent local understanding and then organizing the data along traditional lines. As great as Dewey Decimal and the Library of Congress classification systems are,

they may not appropriately represent the organization of knowledge for cultures not of European descent (Tomren 2003; Kam 2007).

For example, currently the Library of Congress classification places Native Americans/Alaska Natives in the history section (E51–99). This could be interpreted as the continued Western conceit that native people and issues exist only in the past. The Brian Deer classification system (Xwi7xwa Library 2015) used by some First Nations in Canada attempts to remedy this gap by narrowing its focus to only indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) issues, much in the way the Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) classification system is limited to publications of the US federal government. Under Brian Deer, native education falls under the letter E with separate sections for the Mokakit Indian Education Research Association, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. This narrow focus provides a significantly different organization scheme that holds more meaning for First Nations in Canada. It also, consequently, takes indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) people out of history and places them squarely in the present, something which is a philosophically significant divergence from the concept that indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) people only exist in the past.

The Māori Subject Headings/*Nga Upoko Tukutuku* being used by the National Library of New Zealand/*Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa* are another approach to bridging this gap. These subject headings are written in the traditional Māori language to describe terms, objects, and ideas specific to Māori people in the hope of enhancing library “... service to Māori library users” (Whakahau, Aotearoa and New Zealand 2006, ¶3). For example, instead of only using the English language subject heading maps, there is a subject heading titled “*mahere*”. The *tahūhū* or broader term is *Pūtaiao*, and the *Heke* (narrower terms) are listed as: *mahere moana*, *mahere whenua*, and *mahere whetū*. This not only improves access for Māori library users, but it shows respect; the library belongs to them too.

Historical trauma has been interrelated with the persecution of language, culture, and worldview. Mitigating the effects of historical trauma has been demonstrated through an embrace of culture. Libraries, when they are culturally appropriate institutions that are wanted by the community, may also serve this end as “... valued repositories of unique languages, cultures and knowledge” (Newbold 2011, 79). Libraries may serve as institutions that can combat continued negative cultural changes, including historical trauma, on a community scale. After generations of active oppression, having a building filled with stories that not only genuinely reflect and celebrate the worldview of the local community but also represent those ideas in the local language while organizing and describing them in a culturally appropriate way may help to renew a sense of pride. This

affirms that the local view of history is important, that the local worldview is valid, and that the local language is relevant for more than communication in the home.

Both traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions have become a concern for many indigenous peoples in recent years. While groups like the WIPO and the First Archivist Circle have developed protocols to guide the dominant culture in handling items that may be culturally sensitive, these protocols are largely voluntary. However, a tribal library can restrict access to culturally sensitive material in its collection any way that it wants. While this in no way affects TCE or TK outside of the immediate control of the local community, it is another way that the local library can play a positive role for indigenous people. It is a means of empowering native people to have control over their information.

As sovereign nations, Native American/Alaska Native communities have a need to collect, organize, and retrieve information, and they have a right to do it in the way that suits them best. When entering a French library, one wouldn't expect the catalogue to be displayed in English or the books on the shelves to be written in English. There may be English volumes but it is, after all, a French library. So, too, should tribal libraries be constructed. Sovereignty gives native nations the authority to set up cultural repositories and, in turn, those repositories strengthen the sovereignty of their nation.

There are a few examples of libraries, museums, or archives that have already done this. One is the Seneca Nation Archive in New York State. At the 2011 Alaska Native Libraries, Archives, Museums Summit in Anchorage, Alaska, David George-Shongo, a Seneca Nation archivist, spoke about his efforts to introduce cultural relevance into the Seneca Nation Tribal Archives. He talked about building metadata for his archive that reflected the cultural view of the Seneca Nation. For example, stories or songs that were only used seasonally were marked with that seasonal metadata. Management of TCE was also utilized by the Seneca Nation Archive. Under certain circumstances, these culturally sensitive songs were only circulated during the appropriate time of year – an idea that goes directly against the Western philosophy that all things should be available to all people, all of the time. Men's objects or women's objects were also catalogued to reflect this cultural use. George-Shongo indicated that he wasn't stopping a man from examining a woman's object but that it was culturally significant that the man in question should know what it was he was going to look at before he picked it up. It's culturally relevant information that a Western-trained archivist using OCLC MARC metadata would never consider.

The Mashantucket Pequot Archives and Special Collections is another example of a native nation taking control of their identity and presenting it to the public in a way that represents their worldview (Harvey 1996; Stillman 1998;

Bodinger de Uriarte 2003). The Mashantucket Pequot Nation is one of the first Native American nations to establish a casino. During the late 1990s, it was estimated the Foxwoods Resort Casino was grossing more than one billion dollars per year (Bodinger de Uriarte 2003). While Foxwoods has fallen on hard times (Sokolove 2012), during its heyday some of the revenue from the Casino was funneled into a 135 million dollar museum that relates the history of the Mashantucket Pequot Nation (Stillman 1998). What makes this museum particularly remarkable is its use as a means of controlling identity. The Mashantucket Pequot people are not allowing anthropologists or historians to tell their story; they are telling it, highlighting the elements of their history that have meaning to them, and promoting collections of materials that have relevance to the local people today, such as an installation pertaining to the depiction of Native Americans in popular culture or the recorded experiences of Native American cancer survivors (Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center 2013).

Barriers to Overcome

Establishing, or changing, existing tribal libraries with community input is important to cultural preservation. However, there are several barriers that complicate the creation of such spaces.

The first barrier is funding. Finding or constructing a building to house the library, staffing, collection development, electricity and insurance, among many other costs make libraries expensive to set up and maintain. Many native communities simply do not have the monetary resources to devote to a library when they have other more pressing community concerns such as basic utilities, roads, and social services that need their limited financial resources (Patterson 2000). Some nations have overcome this problem, at least temporarily, with casinos on reservation land. While casinos can bring a badly needed infusion of money to a financially struggling reservation, competition among reservation based casinos mixed with a poor US economy has changed even this golden goose into a risky bet (Sokolove 2012). Alaska Native communities currently lack the legal designation to host gaming services. All of these communities will need to find ways to stimulate economic development to support their library.

Assuming the barrier of money can be overcome, communities will need knowledge of library practices to establish and run a community library. Knowledge of library science is limited in many Native American/Alaska Native communities. Despite the American Library Association recognizing the need for librarians from diverse backgrounds (American Library Association 2008), native

students graduating from library science programmes in the United States are still significantly lower than their representation in the population (Patterson 2000; Montiel-Overall and Littletree 2010). However, there are a few programmes, such as Knowledge River at the University of Arizona and Circle of Learning at San Jose State University, that are working hard to increase the number of Native American/Alaska Native students earning a master's degree in library science. Knowledge River had an unprecedented 93% graduation rate between the years 2002 and 2008 (Montiel-Overall and Littletree 2010). Knowledge River is also working hard to allow students to take distance courses, recognizing that native students living in their reservation communities have important ties that give them a "... perspective that differs from individuals who leave the reservation" (Montiel-Overall and Littletree 2010, 82). This local perspective is at the foundation of building a successful tribal library that genuinely meets the needs of the local library patrons.

While an understanding of library theory and practice can be taught in just a few years, worldview and an intimate knowledge of culture cannot. The cultural knowledge and innate understanding of a traditional worldview that Native American/Alaska Native librarians can bring to their community libraries is beyond what any institution of higher education can impart to them. While Knowles and Jolivet refer to all minority groups the following point holds special relevance for Native American/Alaska Native librarians whose language and culture may be essential to their social wellbeing: "Librarians of color are crucial to the provision of services in communities where knowledge of the language, the values, and the cultural heritage of the growing racial and ethnic minority communities is imperative" (Knowles and Jolivet 1991, 189). The tools used by the library – the catalogue, the metadata, and the language – can also be changed to better accommodate indigenous library users.

Library users whose first language is not English, may struggle with an English-only library interface. Utilizing the local language as much as possible while providing an English portal can only benefit language preservation and language revitalization for those communities that want it. The language barrier touches all aspects of the library from the language the books are written in, library signage, the catalogue interface, and the subject terms used. Language and culture are intimately related to worldview. This may require new words to be invented by the community to handle concepts that are new to the culture. For example, George-Shongo used the example that the Seneca Nation didn't have a heritage word for a computer file. He consulted with Elders in the community to find a new word that expressed that idea in the local language.

There may be a technical language barrier related to computer knowledge that needs to be overcome as well. Paired with the use of the local language, it

may be necessary to build a new cataloguing system that organizes information in a culturally relevant way, or the library may require collection of metadata that reflects the cultural need much as the Seneca Nation has. This will vary from community to community, requiring diversity in approach and model.

It may be that the traditional library filled with rows of books isn't the right model for every community. Again returning to the definition that libraries collect information and make that information available, it need not be made up of books at all. Certainly those few academic libraries that replaced their physical collections in favour of purely online collections are still libraries. If a native community was culturally dedicated to maintaining only an oral tradition, perhaps that library would be a building where elders relate knowledge through storytelling. The important point is that the local community needs to decide what that library is, how it functions, and what needs it is intended to fill.

Assuming one could find indigenous librarians to serve every community, pay them a good salary, and build a catalogue and collection that reflected the needs and cultural worldview of the community using the traditional language, one more barrier remains: where are the culturally relevant library materials? There is a dearth of material being generated by any given native nation in their traditional language that reflects their traditional worldview. Hard numbers were beyond the scope of this paper; however, it is likely that there is not enough locally generated media to fill most tribal libraries. There are exceptions, of course: the Lakota language has a body of written material dating back more than 175 years to draw on (Powers 2009), but this is the exception, not the rule. The final piece of this puzzle is the generation of content by native communities. These local libraries must have something to collect: this is control of image and identity which is something native people have not fully had since first contact with the Western world in 1492.

This is also slowly changing. Native American/Alaska Native authors are becoming more common. *Star Wars*, the popular science-fiction film, has been translated into Navajo (Donovan 2013). Musicians, artists, filmmakers, and photographers are finding ways to tap into social networking, YouTube, and Facebook using the internet to circulate media. "Despite the digital divide, Native American presence on the web continues to expand, and Native American cultural representations are growing exponentially with the advent of the web and new media" (Morris, Talbot and Lobo 2009, 203).

Conclusion

We do not want to be perceived, as libraries often are, as a component of a white, European imperialist institution but rather as supportive partners in this process of cultural reassertion. Thus, our methodologies of selection, preservation, classification, access, and dissemination may need to be refashioned and explained in terms that fit into the vision and philosophy of connectivity to Alaska Native cultures (Lincoln 2003, 266).

Sovereignty is an expression of native people affecting the world around them. This allows them to strengthen and promote culture, that in turn works to alleviate social challenges brought on by generations of genocide and assimilation. Strengthening culture and combating social challenges strengthens sovereignty. In the end, hopefully, native people will be better able to pursue a good life of their choosing, not defined from outside, but defined from inside the community according to local values.

On a fundamental level, this paper is a call for tribal libraries to strike away from the uniformity of Western library practices and to develop their own library practices that work best for them. The uniformity of the Western world works directly at cross purposes to diversity and the support of diverse cultures – the very thing that tribal libraries should be working to preserve. This isn't to suggest reinventing things that work well – rather a reassessment of tribal library practices, the rejection of systems that do not serve the needs of the local communities, and the creation of better, more culturally relevant practices that may be unique to any given population.

Affirming culture, strengthening sovereignty and addressing a myriad of social challenges is a tall order and certainly not one a tribal library is going to be able to tackle on its own. However, the library can be part of the circle of national sovereignty, cultural promotion, and, ultimately, societal health.

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